

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**  
**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS POLICY**

**Subject**

Water Supply, Conservation and Reclamation

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**Introduction and Purpose**

Because San Diego is a semi-arid region with very limited local surface or groundwater supplies, about 90% of its water supply for urban and agricultural purposes are imported.

While the ocean provides a potentially unlimited water supply resource, the high cost of desalination and distribution makes this option unacceptable for near-term uses.

The Board of Supervisors has recognized that importation of water from outside the region must be continued, and that maximum use should be made of existing water supply and conveyance systems. Due to Court ordered reductions in California's allotment of Colorado River water, Mono Lake diversions by the City of Los Angeles, and years of delay in completing the State Water Project, Southern California and San Diego County could experience serious water shortages in the future. In short, the region's water conveyance systems may be under-utilized during periods of greatest demand. This results in an inefficient use of water transfer facilities, which may have many years of useful service life remaining.

It is now clear that keeping existing aqueducts, pipelines, and storage systems full of water when most needed can no longer be assured. Equally clear is the fact that California's Legislature and voters have been unwilling to approve and finance major new water development facilities. The consequences of droughts, earthquakes or pipeline failures, and their effects on the region's imported water system must be considered. Public health impacts and economic losses to agriculture, business and industry in such events would be considerable and cannot be dismissed.

Under normal conditions the San Diego region has enough local water storage capacity (assuming reservoirs are full) to supply water for six months to one year in an emergency. However, this available supply of water is not distributed uniformly and some areas could run out of water sooner than others. During prolonged droughts the available supply of water in storage may be considerably less than under normal conditions.

It is important to recognize that although the County is not a water purveyor, it can set a positive example to others in the methods used to manage its own water consuming facilities.

It must also be stressed that water conservation and prudent management of this scarce resource must become a way-of-life for present and future generations of County citizens. As such, the Board of Supervisors has directed the CAO to initiate a Water Management

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Plan and Program to conserve water throughout all County owned and operated facilities. Policies and action programs to achieve this goal are identified in Section I.

Finally, it has also become necessary for the County to begin efforts to regulate water-using activities of private development projects in unincorporated areas. If statewide agreement on future water transfers to Southern California is ever to be achieved, then the Board must be willing to apply conservation restraints along with the region's desire for more water supply imports. Therefore, the Board's water conservation and reclamation policy shall apply to both public and private projects.

It is with this background that the Board shall establish and maintain a Water Supply, Conservation and Reclamation Policy. This Policy shall serve to direct and guide the various water related uses at County facilities and discretionary actions of the Board of Supervisors. This Policy will be reviewed by the Board in three (3) years and adjustments will be made as necessary to reflect current water conditions in the County.

This Policy will serve to inform San Diego County's state and federal representatives that the County of San Diego, working in concert with the San Diego County Water Authority and local jurisdictions, can provide the proper response to the growing water supply problem.

**Section I. Water Conservation and Reclamation in County Facilities and Parks.**

**Policy**

It is the policy of the Board of Supervisors that:

- a. The Director, Department of General Services shall manage County owned and occupied buildings and facilities to standards established by this policy.
- b. The goals and objectives of regional and subregional water conservation plans developed by local water authorities, water districts, and cities shall be endorsed by the Board and incorporated into this policy as necessary.
- c. Where applicable, this policy adopts and incorporates herein the Water Conservation Plan for the County of San Diego as approved by the Board on June 12, 1990. (120)

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**Procedures**

1. Low flow (1.6 gal.) toilets (or approved retrofit devices), low flow shower heads and self-closing faucets for lavatories or hand washing fixtures will be provided in all new County facilities, or in remodeled facilities where the remodeling includes replacement of the plumbing fixtures.

2. All sprinkler systems providing landscaping irrigation to an area of a total of 0.5 acres or larger shall be equipped with an automatic flow-control device (such as a timer or moisture sensor override unit) or other acceptable irrigation management system. Drip irrigation and/or automated irrigation management systems shall be used to the maximum extent practicable.

All automatic irrigation timers should use the multiple watering cycles. For example, if ten minutes of water is needed, there should be two cycles of five minutes.

3. Water use shall be minimized during peak electric demand periods (10 a.m. to 5 p.m. summer and 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. winter). Landscape watering should be done in the early morning to the extent practicable. Laundries should be operated at night or in the early morning.

4. Low flow showerheads that use 3.0 gallons per minute or less shall be installed in showers.

5. Water leaks shall be reported immediately and repaired as quickly as possible. Irrigation should not be set to water when there is no staff available to monitor systems, such as on the weekends.

6. All new landscaping installations shall make extensive use of low water and drought resistant plantings in accordance with the County Water Conservation Landscape Ordinance.

7. The Department of General Services and Department of Parks and Recreation shall investigate and test irrigation equipment and drought resistant plantings to assess the potential for water conservation.

8. Existing flush valves and toilet tanks shall be modified to use the minimum amount of water practicable.

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9. The Department of General Services shall be responsible for ensuring that new and remodeled buildings conform to water conservation requirements, and that conservation measures recommended in the Water Conservation Plan are carried out in all County facilities.

**Responsible Departments**

1. Department of General Services
2. Department of Parks and Recreation

**Section II. General Water Supply and Conservation Policies**

1. The Board of Supervisors shall support those projects and action programs, which will provide the citizens of the region with a long-term (firm) supply of local and imported water.

**Discussion.** Completion of the State Water Project (SWP), restoration of full flow to the Colorado River Aqueduct from water savings in the Imperial Valley, conjunctive groundwater storage in large underground basins (outside San Diego County), and other exchanges would provide for continued use of existing imported delivery systems. Obtaining long-term storage agreements in Lake Mead and other reservoirs is a good example of non-structural type solutions that would enhance San Diego County's water supply. Such approaches might minimize environmental damage while preserving prior public investments.

The Board recognizes public concern over potential environmental impacts to the Sacramento Delta region and upstream counties of the origin, which might occur with large scale water exports out of the area. Implementation of the Federal/State Bay-Delta Ecosystem Partnership Agreement, Federal Central Valley Project Improvement Act, construction of storage reservoirs along the SWP Aqueduct, water transfers/exchanges and other mitigating measures will help to preserve and improve environmental conditions in the Delta. This should allow for SWP contracted entitlements to be delivered to Metropolitan and other contractors as previously authorized by the State's voters.

2. The Board shall support development of cost-effective and environmentally acceptable surface and groundwater storage facilities.

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**Discussion.** These facilities are needed to conserve surplus wet weather flows for delivery to water users during periods of peak demand. Due to the potential for disruption of both the State Water Project and Colorado River Aqueducts from earthquake activity along the San Andreas and other nearby fault zones, the Board shall support efforts of San Diego County Water Authority and Metropolitan Water District to develop cost-effective storage facilities located near demand areas within San Diego County and/or away from known earthquake hazard areas.

3. The Board shall support efforts by members of the California Legislature and public and private organizations to establish voluntary water exchanges and free water markets in California and other Western states.

**Discussion.** Water marketing, while containing several unresolved institutional, legal and economic questions, may have significant water supply benefits for semi-arid regions like San Diego County. The extent to which conveyance facilities are or could be made available to transport the water is a limiting factor. In most cases facilities currently exist to transport water over long distances to the County. Because of this, development of additional conveyance systems might be postponed resulting in substantial cost savings to present and future water users. Metropolitan and the Water Authority have the financial ability to compete for surplus agricultural or other water supplies. The Board shall actively support their efforts.

4. The Board shall, where appropriate, require water reclamation and reuse facilities that are shown to be cost-effective as part of new projects.

**Discussion.** Water reclamation provides a significant source of new irrigation water to offset imported demands or local water supplies for non-potable purposes. This Policy shall be carried out in concert with the Board's adopted Water Reclamation Ordinance (No. 7737) and the Water Quality Control Board - Region 9 adopted reclamation policies. In the event the basin in which a project is to be located has an adopted water reclamation and reuse program, the Board shall require conformance to the provisions of that plan. The Board shall also support development of water repurification facilities that meet or exceed public health standards.

5. The Board shall, together with the San Diego County Water Authority, support necessary changes in the water right allocations that will:

- 1) Increase San Diego County's preferential water entitlement to a level commensurate with actual use; or otherwise obtain assurances that any future water shortages will be spread evenly throughout MWD.

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2) Provide agriculture with assurance that those who undertake conservation and/or water reclamation programs will be entitled to an adequate water supply during water shortages.

**Discussion.** San Diego County water users, through the Water Authority, purchase approximately one-third (30%) of all water sold by Metropolitan each year, yet the Authority only has firm entitlement to approximately 11% of available Metropolitan supplies.

During normal years there is little cause for concern. However, during dry or drought year conditions, this could create serious problems for the region. It is important that any future shortages be shared equally among all imported water users.

The County, through its legislative program, shall provide greater assistance to the Water Authority in correcting any regional imbalances.

The other area of concern is with agriculture. Agriculture contributes significantly to the economic diversity and well being of the San Diego region. In the event of water shortages, agricultural water deliveries could be severely reduced.

Agriculture in San Diego County uses approximately 100,000 acre-feet of water per year for irrigation or about 20-25% of the region's total annual water use. This contrasts sharply with other regions such as the Central Valley where agricultural water use may exceed 80% of total water deliveries.

In recent years, San Diego County farmers have demonstrated their commitment to efficient water use. It seems unjustified that they should be penalized for good water management practices. It is in the Central Valley region where opportunities exist to conserve agricultural water use, not in San Diego County.

6. The Board shall encourage and support environmentally acceptable research and demonstration projects that utilize non-traditional water production and conservation techniques.

**Discussion.** Incentives are needed to encourage public and private sector research and demonstration programs in such non-traditional water development areas as brackish water treatment, repurification, desalination, weather modification, watershed management and non-structural programs. Innovative conservation programs are also needed.

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The Board shall direct its representatives in Sacramento and Washington, D.C. to actively support legislative measures that will accomplish this goal. However, these facilities should only be considered for public funding after a thorough review of environmental impacts and efficiencies in existing water management and water right allocations.

7. The Board direct its representatives on the SANDAG Board and Water Authority Board to work with other local agencies in order to establish and maintain a uniform policy approach to water supply and conservation in the San Diego region.

**Discussion.** The Water Authority and SANDAG serve as the proper regional forum for local officials to address regional water problems. Those agencies are actively responding to assure the region's voice is heard at the State and Federal levels. The Board shall continue to support these efforts and to provide staff support as needed.

8. The County will cooperate with water districts, cities and other agencies on water issues of mutual concern including the ongoing evaluation and monitoring of the adequacy of the regional supply of water. If deemed necessary, the County will participate in efforts to improve coordination between land use approvals and the region's water supply.

**Discussion.** In spite of the development of new sources of water and the reduction in per capita consumption, the potential still exists for water demand to exceed supply.

It is important to monitor projected growth in conjunction with regional water availability. It is determined that there is insufficient supply to meet the needs of projected growth, the rate of development might have to be slowed, and/or the types of development permitted may have to change. Since this issue involves regional facilities and supply, the County cannot act effectively on its own. While the County has land development jurisdiction over a large amount of territory in the San Diego region, more than three-quarters of new construction occurs within the cities.

Therefore, policies and procedures to regulate the allocation of water service need to be instituted on a regional basis.

The cities and the County are directly responsible for making land use decisions. The County Water Authority together with its members, the water purveyors, would be the appropriate agencies to gather information on the status of the regional water supply. Coordination among these entities is needed to determine whether water supply will be sufficient to keep pace with currently projected growth, and to jointly determine appropriate land use actions in anticipation of, or in the event of, a water shortage.

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9. The Board shall use its powers to assure that local water supplies and distribution facilities are protected.

**Discussion.** San Diego County has a number of dams and reservoirs, which store local and imported water. The quality of the water in some of these reservoirs is threatened by encroaching urban developments. The Board shall not approve a subdivision map or development unless adequate provisions are made to protect water supply reservoirs from urban runoff.

10. The Board will incorporate water conservation requirements into the planning review process.

**Discussion.** The Board intends to significantly reduce water wastage in new development through the use of land development policies and regulations in order to mandate indoor and outdoor water conservation and water reclamation measures where appropriate.

**Sunset Review**

This policy will be reviewed for continuance by December 31, 2008.

**Board Action**

6/10/86 (163)  
12/03/86 (7)  
12/12/89 (49)  
6/05/90 (43)  
12/04/90 (56)  
2/01/95 (23)  
3/12/2002 (10)

**CAO Reference**

1. Department of General Services
2. Department of Planning and Land Use
3. Department of Public Works
4. Department of Parks and Recreation
5. Health and Human Services Agency